

The Second Epistle of JOHN

INTRODUCTION

1. Title. In the ancient Greek manuscripts the title is simply *Iōannou B*, literally, “Of John 2.” See on the Title of the First Epistle (p. 623). No external evidence enables us to decide whether the present letter is second in order of writing, but from a comparison of the contents of the three epistles credited to John, it seems likely that the second was written after the first. The second appears to refer to the contents of the first in a manner that is natural if the writer had already penned the longer letter, but which would be strange if the shorter were written first (cf. 2 John 5–7, 9, 12 with 1 John 1:4; 2:4, 5, 7 18; 5:10–12).

2. Authorship. To a certain extent the question of authorship is settled by the first two words of the epistle, “the elder,” but the identity of “the elder” still calls for discussion. Scholarly consensus favors John as the author, and it is generally agreed that the title “elder” is singularly fitting for the aged apostle who lingered long after his fellow disciples had died. If John were writing to an individual or a group with whom he was well acquainted, there would be no need for other identification beyond the affectionate title by which he was already known to his readers.

The identification of “the elder” largely depends on the relationship that is found to exist between the second and first epistles, and between them and the Fourth Gospel. The obvious similarities between the second and first letters suggest a common authorship. The word “antichrist” occurs only in v. 7 and in 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3. For similarity in phraseology, cf. “walking in truth” (2 John 4) with “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7); “a new commandment” (2 John 5; 1 John 2:8); “love one another” (2 John 1:5; 1 John 3:11); “he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 1:9) with “he that hath the Son” (1 John 5:12). As outlined in the Introduction to the First Epistle, there are valid reasons for accepting the apostle John as the author of that letter as well as of the Gospel. If those reasons be accepted, John may also be taken to be the author of the present epistle.

3. Historical Setting. For reasons given above, it seems probable that this letter was written after the first epistle, and, if John be accepted as the author, soon after the first letter, in view of the apostle’s age (see Introduction to the First Epistle). The additional factor brought to light by the second epistle is that false teachers were taking advantage of Christian hospitality to disseminate erroneous doctrine.

4. Theme. Even a casual reading of the epistle will reveal its intimate nature. It is indeed a personal letter, but whether it is addressed to an individual or to a group depends on the interpretation given to the phrase “the elect lady and her children” (see on v. 1). Within these limits, the theme of the epistle is one of satisfaction with the spiritual state of the readers, encouragement for them in the Christian way, warning against false teachers, and suggestions for dealing with the deceivers. The letter reveals the writer’s tender, loving spirit, and the beauty of spiritual intimacy that could exist between fellow believers in the early church.

It has been suggested that the almost identical length of the second and third epistles was determined by the size of the papyrus sheet then commonly used (see Vol. V, pp. 112, 113).

5. Outline.

So brief a letter, touching upon so many different topics, must be divided into very small units in order to list the subjects it contains. However, there are three main sections in the epistle.

- I. Introduction, 1–3.
 - A. Salutation, 1a.
 - B. The tie that binds, 1a, 2.
 - C. Benediction, 3.
 - II. Message, 4–11.
 - A. Praise for faithfulness, 4.
 - B. Exhortation to continue in love, 5, 6.
 - C. Warning against false teachers, 7–11.
 - 1. Warning against deceivers, 7, 8.
 - 2. Results of continued friendship with deceivers, 9.
 - 3. How to deal with heretical teachers, 10, 11.
 - III. Conclusion, 12, 13.
 - A. Hope of an early meeting, 12.
 - B. Greetings from friends or relatives, 13.
- 1 *He exhorteth a certain honourable matron, with her children, to persevere in Christian love and belief, 8 lest they lose the reward of their former profession: 10 and to have nothing to do with those seducers that bring not the true doctrine of Christ Jesus.*

1. Elder. Gr. *presbuteros* (see on Acts 11:30). The title may refer to age or to position, or to both. Since this commentary holds that the apostle John was the author of this epistle (see p. 683), it may be observed how fitting is the word “elder” in his case. At the time when the epistle was written, c. A.D. 95 (see p. 683), John would be an old man and—according to tradition—being the last surviving apostle, would occupy a venerated position in the expanding Christian church. Therefore, when writing to people who were well acquainted with him, there would be no need for any other identification than the simple, unpretentious title, “elder.”

Some suggest that the title, “the elder,” refers to another person, identified as John the Presbyter, or the Elder John. Support for this view is drawn from the words of Papias (died c. A.D. 163) as reported by the church historian Eusebius. In his *Ecclesiastical History* (iii. 39. 4; Loeb ed., vol. 1, p. 293) Eusebius quotes Papias as follows: “But if ever anyone came who had followed the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other of the Lord’s disciples, had said, and what Aristion and the presbyter John, the Lord’s disciples, were saying.” But it is extremely doubtful whether Papias is here referring to different persons, both bearing the name of John. It is probable that he is speaking of one and the same person, John, the beloved disciple. In the first reference, he includes him among the other apostles who may have left written records; in the second, he appears to include him with Aristion as one from whose own lips he (Papias) had heard direct testimony concerning the Lord Jesus. Thus the very existence of a distinct Presbyter John is open to doubt; the name may be only another designation for the last of the apostles. In this case the title “elder” has still more apt significance when applied to John.

Elect. Gr. *eklektos*, “picked out,” from *eklegō*, “to choose,” probably used here in the sense of ethical eminence. Some have preferred to take the word as a feminine proper

name, *Eklekta*, but such an interpretation is hardly tenable in view of the clear use of *eklektos* as an adjective in v. 13.

Lady. Gr. *kuria*. Two translations of this word are possible. One takes it to be a lady's proper name, *Kyria* or *Cyria*, which is not unknown in Greek inscriptions. But the Greek construction makes it improbable that the writer is here using a proper name. The second possible translation of *kuria* is "lady," a courteous form of address that is the feminine equivalent of *kurios*, "lord" (see on John 13:13). In this case the phrase used here, *eklekte kuria*, literally means, "to an elect lady."

There still remains the problem of interpretation. To whom was John addressing his epistle? To this question two answers are advanced: (1) He was writing to a specific Christian lady and her literal children; (2) He was writing to the church, or a church that he chose to call "an elect lady." A combination of the above two views may well provide the best solution to the problem. The lady to whom the letter is addressed may have been the leader of the church to which John writes, and her "children" may be the church members (cf. 3 John 4). The tenor of the message is more suited to a group of believers than to an individual, and to mature Christians rather than to children of a certain woman.

Her children. These may be the actual children of the "elect lady," or the members of the church to whom the letter is read (cf. 1 John 2:1).

Whom. The Greek pronoun is masculine plural, and refers to the elect lady and her children of both sexes.

I love. The pronoun is emphatic in the Greek. John may also have been stressing *his* love because others were not showing affection for the Christians to whom he was writing (cf. 3 John 9).

In the truth. Literally, "in truth," that is, John loves his friends in the sphere of "truth," that is, in connection with all that is expounded in the Christian faith.

All they. While there may have been those false teachers and upstarts who would not love John's readers, he strikes a reassuring note by referring to the genuine believers who will love those to whom he is writing.

Have known. That is, have come to know and are still knowing. John is speaking to the faithful Christians who have not backslidden.

The truth. That is, the Christian doctrine, as expounded by Christ, who is "truth" (see on John 8:32; cf. John 14:6), and "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17). Those who hold such "truth" naturally love those who share their beliefs.

2. For the truth's sake. Literally, "on account of the truth." It is on account of our common acceptance of the truth that we are so closely related to one another by the cords of love.

Dwelleth. Gr. *menō* (see on 1 John 2:6). Truth must live in the hearts of the believers before it can be a unifying factor among them. John is confident that the members of his Christian community fulfilled the qualification.

Shall be with us. Presumably, the truth had also once dwelt in the hearts of those who later apostatized, but here the apostle expresses firm confidence that truth will perpetually abide with the members of his circle. Such confidence does not preclude individual

apostasy, but does proclaim the consistent adherence of the church to its Heaven-sent doctrine.

For ever. Gr. *eis ton aiōna* (see on Rev. 1:6; 14:11). John never intends to relinquish the central facts of Christian faith on which his belief is based—the loving nature of God, the incarnation, the atoning death, the resurrected life of the Son of God.

3. Grace. Gr. *charis* (see on Rom. 1:7; 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:3). Apart from John 1:14, 16, 17; Rev. 1:4; 22:21, the word *charis*, “grace,” appears only here in the writings of John, but it is a key word in Paul’s vocabulary. John makes frequent use of *agapē* “love” (see on 1 Cor. 13:1), and employs it 18 times in his first epistle. The threefold greeting, “grace, mercy, and peace,” is found in Paul’s pastoral epistles (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4). John uses it here in a slightly different form.

With you. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the reading “with us.” The apostle is still including himself and his Christian friends in the message to the “elect lady.”

Mercy. Gr. *eleos* (cf. on Matt. 5:7). The word occurs nowhere else in the Johannine writings.

Peace. See on Rom. 1:7. When grace has awakened a desire for salvation and the heart seeks God for forgiveness and rebirth, then the Lord can give the second gift, “mercy,” or compassion, which would be wasted on one who did not realize his need (Luke 18:10–14). “Peace” comes when the forgiven sinner realizes that he has been reconciled to God and is no longer under the condemnation of the law, which he has broken (see on Rom. 5:1).

From God. Literally, “from the side of God,” hence, “from the presence of God,” indicating that God is the source from which grace, mercy, and peace flow to the believer.

The Father. See on Rom. 1:7, where Paul speaks of “*our* Father.”

Lord Jesus Christ. Important textual evidence may be cited (cf. p. 10) for the omission of “Lord.” The full title “Lord Jesus Christ” does not occur elsewhere in John’s writings. For comment on “Jesus Christ” see on 1 John 1:3. The apostle emphasizes the equality of the Son with the Father and the fact that spiritual gifts proceed to men from both persons of the God-head (cf. on 1 John 1:2, 3).

The Son of the Father. A unique phrase in Scripture. It emphasizes the central thought in John’s theology, the divinity of his Master, Jesus Christ.

Truth and love. The two elements necessary for the reception of the divinely bestowed gifts of grace, mercy, and peace. The two words “truth” and “love” may be taken as the key words of this short epistle. Common as both words are in the NT, especially in the writings of John, their juxtaposition does not occur elsewhere in the NT.

4. I rejoiced greatly. The greeting over, the apostle begins his message. Like Paul in his epistles (Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3; etc.) and like Christ in His letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2; 3), John begins with pleasant and praiseworthy matters (cf. 3 John 3).

I found. Or, “I have found.” John may have formed his estimate of the faithfulness of the believers either by personal observation or, as in 3 John 3, from the reports of visiting brethren.

Of thy children. Literally, “out of thy children.” This may reflect the possibility that all church members had not proved faithful. It may also be that John had not met or heard reports of *all* the “children,” and that others were equally faithful.

Walking. Gr. *peripateō* (see on Eph. 2:2). The word is frequently used in Scripture to describe the daily conduct (cf. Phil. 3:17).

In truth. That is, consistently living under the control of truth, faithfully performing every duty on earth as part of the walk toward the eternal home (see on 1 John 1:7).

As we have received a commandment. Or, “even as we received a commandment.” Although the commandment is not defined, John’s previous writings suggest a reference to the “new commandment” of love (see on 1 John 2:7, 8; 3:23; 4:21).

5. Now. In v. 4 the apostle recorded past satisfaction at the condition of his friends. He *now* concerns himself with their future conduct.

Beseech. Gr. *erōtaō*, “to ask,” “to pray,” “to beseech,” and “to desire.”

Thee. The use of the singular pronoun is cited by some as proof that the recipient of the letter was a literal lady, but this reasoning is weakened by the writer’s later use of “yourselves” (v. 8), “you” (vs. 10, 12, a plural as indicated by the Greek). It would appear that John uses both singular and plural forms of address interchangeably in this letter.

Lady. Gr. *kuria* (see on v. 1).

New commandment. See on 1 John 2:7, 8; 3:11. It is probable that the readers of this epistle had also read John’s first letter.

6. This is love. Literally, “this is the love,” that is, this is the love about which I am talking. John then defines that love as walking “after his commandments.” Love consists not only in cherishing kind feelings toward others but in observing right conduct toward our fellows as directed in God’s commandments. These commands, faithfully observed, will result in practical demonstrations of love to our fellows (cf. on 1 John 2:3–6; 3:23; 5:3).

This is the commandment. The one command concerning love comprehends all the other precepts given by the Lord. This explains John’s alternating use of the singular and plural forms, “commandment” and “commandments” (see on John 13:34; Rom. 13:8). The apostle does not define the commandment, but reminds his readers of it, assuming that they are well enough acquainted with it to need no more than the reminder.

That ... ye should walk in it. Or, “that ye should keep on walking in it,” that is, molding the life according to the law of love.

7. For. Or, “because.” The word connects vs. 6 and 7. The immediate reason for John’s stress on “the commandment” is the activity of the “deceivers,” which can be effectively counteracted only by the practice of the law of love.

Deceivers. The troublemakers are clearly identified later in the present verse: they are those who deny the full implications of the incarnation.

Are entered. Rather, “went forth” (cf. on 1 John 4:1).

Who confess not. See on 1 John 2:22; 4:3.

Is come. The clause reads literally, “those not confessing Jesus Christ coming in flesh.” The form of the Greek verb emphasizes the timelessness of the truth of the incarnation, in contrast with 1 John 4:2, where the historical fact is stressed (see comment there).

A deceiver. Rather, “the deceiver.”

An antichrist. Rather, “the antichrist.” See on 1 John 2:18, 22. John identifies all “deceivers” as being ultimately represented by the great deceiver and antichrist, Satan. All deceptive work proceeds from the devil, no matter what local form his servants may take.

8. Look to yourselves. That is, beware, or take heed (cf. Mark 13:9). The apostle has issued a general warning against deceivers (2 John 7), but now makes a personal application to his readers. It may be noted that he addresses a group, “yourselves,” rather than an individual, “thyself” (cf. on v. 5), supporting the thought that John is writing to a church and not simply to an individual member.

We lose not. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the reading, “ye lose not,” a reading that harmonizes with the context. John is aware of the possibility of falling from the faith, and wants to open his readers’ eyes to the dangers that confront them (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27; 10:12). But the final responsibility rests on the believers themselves, hence the admonition “look to yourselves.”

We have wrought. That is, John and his collaborators have wrought—a reference to their evangelistic work, the results of which should not be lost to the believers.

We receive. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the reading, “ye receive” (cf. above on “we lose not”). The word translated “receive” may be rendered “receive from,” or “receive back,” that is, from God, the One from whom all good rewards come.

Reward. Gr. *misthos* (see on Rom. 6:23). The “full reward” can be none other than immortality, which will be enjoyed only by those who remain faithful unto the end (cf. on Matt. 24:13; Gal. 6:9).

9. Whosoever transgresseth. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the reading, “whosoever goeth before,” that is, whoever tries to go ahead of Christ’s teaching, as the Gnostics (see pp. 625, 626) did. The phraseology is strongly reminiscent of John’s first epistle (cf. on 1 John 3:6).

Abideth not. The Greek construction shows that these words qualify “whosoever transgresseth,” that is, whosoever goes ahead. There is nothing wrong in going ahead so long as one remains within the framework of the Saviour’s own doctrine. But he who tries to go where Christ has not led, places himself outside Christ’s domain, and thus remains not in the doctrine given by Jesus.

Doctrine. Or, “teaching” (see on John 7:16). While “the teaching of Christ” may be taken as teaching *about* Christ, the context clearly favors a reference to the teaching *given* by Christ. The expression covers the doctrine personally delivered by the Master and its continuation in the preaching of the apostles. The “deceivers” were not willing to limit themselves to such teachings, but were bent on adding other points of their own, thus going beyond what the Saviour Himself had taught.

Hath not God. This phrase is reminiscent of the first epistle (cf. 1 John 5:12). Since the Son and the Father are one (John 10:30), he who rejects Christ’s teaching also rejects the Father’s, and shows that he is trying to outreach God; he is not content with the height and depth of spiritual knowledge God has placed at man’s disposal, but wants to probe into other realms that can only contain falsehood.

Abideth. Gr. *menō* (see on 1 John 2:6). To remain and make one’s home in the doctrine that Christ taught and believed, instead of straying into the realms of philosophical speculation or following the deceptive gleams of satanic delusions, is the only way to ensure a saving relationship with the Father.

Hath both. In developing a positive statement from a negative, John, as his custom is (cf. 1 John 1:6, 7; 2:21; etc.), has enriched his thought. He who wanders outside of truth loses the Father; he who remains has the Father—and also the Son through whom all truth is revealed (1 John 2:23).

10. If there come. That is, when there comes, indicating that visits from heretical teachers are anticipated.

Bring not this doctrine. The phrase serves to definite the visitor and to show that he is a teacher of anti-Christian doctrine, evidently bent on seducing faithful church members.

Receive him not. This apparently inhospitable counsel applies only in the case of a “deceiver” and “antichrist” (v. 7), and has no direct bearing on the hospitality that Christians should cheerfully show to needy friends and strangers (see Matt. 25:35; Heb. 13:2). There would be no point in receiving a visitor who was determined to deceive the church of God.

House. This may refer to the individual’s own home, or to a house where the church was meeting.

God speed. Gr. *chairein*, literally, “to rejoice,” used often in the NT as a greeting (see on Rom. 1:7). It is not possible for a Christian to “rejoice” or to wish God’s blessing on a “deceiver.” He may pray for him, that he may see the error of his ways and turn to embrace the full gospel of Christ, but Christian fellowship is not possible between the believer and the false teacher (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9–13).

11. Is partaker. Gr. *koinōneō*, “to have in common,” “to share in.” John makes it clear why we should not entertain false teachers: voluntary association with them will make it appear that we approve of their teachings, and the undiscerning might misinterpret even well-meaning hospitality given to such teachers.

12. Many things. In this letter the apostle has dealt only with the most urgent matter, to warn his readers about the danger of false teachers. Many other topics call for attention, but they can best be dealt with more clearly and expeditiously by word of mouth. John appears to be his own secretary.

Paper. Gr. *chartēs*, “a sheet of papyrus,” a common writing material. The word appears only here in the NT, though it appears in the LXX of Jer. 36:23.

Ink. For a discussion of ancient writing materials see Vol. V, pp. 112–114.

Face to face. Literally, “mouth to mouth” (cf. Num. 12:8), John’s emphasis being on the interchange of speech rather than the mere sight of his friends.

Our joy. The apostle’s visit would bring joy not only to the believers but also to himself. Thus, their joy would be mutual (cf. on 1 John 1:4).

13. Thy elect sister. These words may refer to either (1) an actual sister of an individual “elect lady” (v. 1), or (2) a sister church in the area in which John was then writing. The two ideas may be combined as in v. 1 (see comment there).

Amen. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the omission of this word.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

7–11AA 554; SL 64

The Third Epistle of JOHN INTRODUCTION

1. Title. In the ancient Greek manuscripts the title is simply *Iōannou G*, literally, “Of John 3.” See on the Title of the First Epistle (p. 623).

2. Authorship. Had there been no second epistle, the authorship of the third might have been a matter for considerable dispute. But the similarity in style between the second and third epistles points to a common authorship, so that once John is accepted as the author of the second epistle, he may also be accepted as author of the third.

3. Historical Setting. The epistle is clearly a personal letter written to an unidentified Gaius, a faithful Christian who is highly commended for his hospitable charity toward traveling teachers. Two other characters are named: Diotrephes, a contentious leader; and Demetrius, who is possibly one of the traveling teachers. The picture that emerges from what is written about these three men represents an advanced stage of development in the Christian church, and suggests that this epistle was written after the second, and consequently still closer to the end of John’s life. The ministry of itinerant preachers, or of visiting brethren, appears to be well established (vs. 5–8); Diotrephes assumes the power to cast from the church, possibly by a form of excommunication (v. 10), those of whom he does not personally approve; and the apostle’s authority has been undermined by the Diotrephes faction (vs. 9–11). All this points to a development of the situation revealed in the second epistle, and makes the third the last in the trio of letter preserved to us. This is not to say that John wrote no other letters. There is no evidence to prove that the letter referred to in v. 9 was the second epistle, although it is an attractive possibility; and there is no way of determining the length of time that passed between the writing of the second epistle and that of the third, but it seems probable that the interval was brief, since the letters are so closely related in style and content.

4. Theme. This is simple and direct. Whereas the second epistle was written to warn against itinerant false teachers, this one is sent to oppose the schismatic tendencies exemplified by the actions of Diotrephes.

It is probable that Diotrephes was the elder of the church and that he had accepted some of the false teachings of the Gnostics (see pp. 625, 626). When John wrote to the churches to rebuke such false teaching, Diotrephes appears to have refused to read the letter to the members (v. 9). Visiting ministers who may have been sent by John were also refused a hearing, and those who listened to them privately were signally disfellowshipped by this arrogant man.

By writing to Gaius, John endeavors to ensure the delivery of his message to the loyal members. He may have been preparing them to accept a change of church elders when he should come and “remember” the deeds of Diotrephes (v. 10).

The same spirit of tender personal affection is evinced in this letter as in the apostle’s other writings, and, over and above the immediate purpose of the epistle, there shines the beauty of the apostle’s own character and the inspiration that he brings to his readers in all ages.

5. Outline.

- I. Introduction, 1.
- II. Message, 2–12.
 - A. Good wishes and satisfaction, 2–4.
 - B. Hospitality praised, 5–8.
 - C. Hostility opposed, 9, 10.
 - D. A lesson and recommendation, 11, 12.

III. Conclusion, 13, 14.

He commendeth Gaius for his piety, 5 and hospitality 7 to true preachers: 9 complaining of the unkind dealing of ambitious Diotrephes on the contrary side, 11 whose evil example is not to be followed: 12 and giveth special testimony to the good report of Demetrius.

1. The elder. John (see on 2 John 1).

Wellbeloved. Rather, simply, “beloved,” a term of affection frequently used in NT greetings (Rom. 1:7; 16:5; Col. 4:9; etc.), usually in connection with people who are personally known to the writer.

Gaius. A common name in the Roman Empire, and one borne by at least three other NT characters (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14). See on Acts 19:29. There are no grounds for identifying any of these men with the Gaius to whom John is now writing. Nothing is known of this man apart from what is disclosed in this epistle.

I love. See on 2 John 1.

In the truth. See on 2 John 1.

2. Beloved. See on v. 1.

I wish. The clause literally reads “concerning all things, I wish [or, “pray”] thee to prosper.” This rendering reveals a more balanced desire on John’s part: he is not supremely concerned about prosperity and health, as the KJV implies, but has general prosperity in mind, thus covering spiritual as well as material well-being. John’s prayer illustrates a good habit for Christians to form; remembrance of a friend should stimulate prayer on his behalf (cf. on Phil. 1:3, 4; 1 Thess. 1:2, 3).

Prosper. Gr. *euodoō*, originally, “to have a prosperous journey,” then used in a general sense, “to be successful,” “to prosper” (cf. 1 Cor. 16:2). The Lord is not unmindful of our temporal needs. He wants us to succeed in our temporal as well as our spiritual affairs. A good Christian should be a good businessman, or workman, since, in addition to natural ability he may also enjoy the blessing of God on his daily duties.

Be in health. Gr. *hugiainō* (cf. our word “hygiene”), “to be sound,” “to be in good health,” and so used by the physician Luke (Luke 5:31; 7:10; 15:27). Paul uses it of those who are “sound in faith” (Titus 1:13; 2:2). God is interested in our physical condition, and wants us to enjoy the best of health. Because of the close connection between mind and body, when the soul or character prospers, the body is better able to be healthy (Ex. 15:26; Prov. 14:30; MH 241). Conversely, when the health of the body is neglected and bad physical habits are established, the religious life also suffers (MH 280, 315, 319).

As thy soul. Here the reference appears to be to Gaius’ spiritual life, which was strong. It is possible that his physical condition was not so good. He may have neglected the physical concerns of life for the religious. Such neglect is harmful; balance is essential to successful living. The enemy of souls is also well aware of the importance of balance, and seeks to drive earnest Christians into extreme positions (MH 318–324). The combination of a balanced health program with genuine spiritual advancement will prepare us to overcome the temptations of modern life and help us to meet the high standard set for entrance to heaven (2T 375, 376).

All who are followers of Christ may well make John’s prayer for Gaius their own, for themselves, their households, and their fellow believers.

3. I rejoiced greatly. See on 2 John 4.

When the brethren came. The Greek construction implies repeated visits by the brethren, so that John received frequent reports concerning Gaius.

Testified. Or, “bore witness.” Note that the brethren were willing bearers of good reports; they did not carry malicious gossip.

Truth that is in thee. For comment on the Johannine concept of truth see on John 1:14; 8:32. Compare on 2 John 1. Note that “the truth” is “in” Gaius—he has appropriated it and made it his own.

Walkest. Gr. *peripateō*, “to conduct oneself” (see on Eph. 2:2). Gaius was not content with *possessing* truth; he also *practiced* the beliefs he held.

4. No greater joy. The greatest possible joy fills a Christian worker when he sees the members of his flock taking a strong and resolute stand for right and truth. He is far happier than if he heard only of their success in acquiring wealth or position (cf. 2 Cor. 7:7; 1 Thess. 3:6).

My children. Rather, “my own children.” This may indicate that Gaius was one of John’s own converts (cf. on 1 John 2:1; 2 John 4; cf. 1 Thess. 2:7–12; 1 Tim. 1:2).

Walk in truth. Or, “walking in the truth,” that is, continuing to order the life in harmony with the revelation of God’s character as given by Jesus Christ.

5. Beloved. See on v. 1.

Faithfully. Or, “a faithful thing.” All the kindly deeds of Gaius were acts of faith.

To the brethren. That is, fellow members of the church.

And to strangers. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the reading “and this to strangers,” meaning “especially to strangers,” (see RSV). Many whom Gaius so liberally entertained were strangers to him, although their credentials assured him of their worthiness.

6. Charity. Gr. *agapē* “love” (see on 1 Cor. 13:1).

Church. Gr. *ekklēsia* (see on Matt. 18:17).

Bring forward on their journey. Gr. *propempō*, “to accompany,” “to escort,” “to help on one’s journey.”

After a godly sort. Literally, “worthily of God” (cf. on 1 Thess. 2:12). Gaius was to see in every faithful Christian worker an ambassador for God, one who merited respectful treatment because of the work he was doing (see on Matt. 10:40; 2 Cor. 5:20).

Do well. The hospitality Gaius gave to traveling brethren would, in addition to promoting the preaching of the gospel, help to bind the believers together and counter the tendency for the workers to separate themselves into a hierarchy.

7. His name’s sake. Textual evidence attests (cf. p. 10) the reading “for the sake of the name,” that is, the name of Jesus (see on Acts 3:16; 4:12; Rom. 1:5).

Went forth. That is, from their home church, possibly Ephesus. In John’s day the evangelistic spirit, leading Christians to publish the good news from place to place, was commendably active.

Taking nothing. That is, expecting no support from the heathen people to whom they preached the gospel (cf. on 2 Cor. 12:14; 1 Thess. 2:9). This made the missionaries all the more grateful for hospitality offered by their fellow Christians. There is no scriptural prohibition against accepting help that is willingly offered (see on Matt. 10:8–14; Phil. 4:10, 14–17).

Gentiles. Gr. *ethnē*, “nations,” “Gentiles” (see on Gal. 3:8). Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the reading *ethnikoi*, “pagans” “heathen people” (see on Gal. 3:8).

8. *We therefore.* Because the missionaries took nothing from the heathen, and because there was no regular support from a treasury at that time, it was necessary that men like Gaius help the workers and thus relieve them of the necessity of asking alms. By his use of “we” John acknowledges his own duty in this matter of hospitality.

Ought. See on 1 John 2:6.

Receive. Gr. *apolambanō*, “to take back,” or “to receive from,” but textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the reading *hupolambanō*, here used in the sense “to support.”

Such. That is, those mentioned in v. 7. John is careful to define those who qualify for the believers’ hospitality (cf. on 2 John 10, 11).

Fellowhelpers. Rather, “fellow workers.” Those who aid the workers are themselves counted as workers.

To the truth. There are two possible interpretations to this phrase: (1) the hospitable members are fellow workers with the missionaries in proclaiming truth; (2) the hospitable ones are fellow workers with truth, truth being personified. John’s use of the word “truth” makes the second interpretation acceptable (cf. 1 John 1:6; 2:4; 3 John 3, 4; etc.).

9. *I wrote.* Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the reading, “I wrote somewhat,” an expression that is generally taken to refer to a previous short epistle. It is possible that John is referring to the second epistle, but strong arguments have been advanced against this view and in favor of a lost letter. In favor of the second epistle is the similarity in content between the two letters: the first gives negative advice concerning traveling preachers; the second seems to deal more with the positive point of view. It may have been that Diotrophes refused to read the second epistle because he had Gnostic leanings (see pp. 625, 626) and did not wish to refuse hospitality to the false teachers who shared his views. But whatever explanation is proposed it can at best be but hypothetical, and it is possible that John is referring to a letter that has not been preserved in the sacred canon. If this is the case, we here have another instance of apostolic writing that has not been included in the Scriptures (cf. on 1 Cor. 5:9).

The church. That is, the church of which Diotrophes and Gaius were members.

Diotrophes. Gr. *Diotrophēs*, from *Dios*, meaning “of Zeus,” and *trephō*, “to nourish,” “to nurse,” hence, “nourished by Zeus.” Some have suggested that there may be significance in the fact that Diotrophes had retained his heathen name; however, see on v. 12. He may have retained elements of heathen philosophy, and thus have been particularly susceptible to Gnostic influences.

Loveth to have the preeminence. Diotrophes harbored unholy ambition in his mind. He aspired to be first for the sake of position rather than for the sake of the good he might accomplish. The position itself is not defined, and there is no evidence to show that a bishopric is referred to. The Christian church was already well instructed concerning undesirable ambition (Matt. 20:20–28; Luke 22:24–27; John 13:1–17).

Among them. That is, among the members of the church to which Gaius and Diotrophes belonged.

Receiveth. Gr. *epidechomai*, “to accept,” “to recognize someone’s authority.” The word is used only here and in v. 10 in the NT. Here it refers to acceptance of a person’s authority; in v. 10 it refers to receiving a person hospitably. It would appear that Diotrophes refused to read John’s epistle, and thus rejected the authority of the apostle and his associates.

10. If I come. Some see in these words a reference to the hope expressed in 2 John 12, and as support for identifying the second epistle with the letter mentioned in 3 John 9. But it must be noted that the hope expressed in v. 14 of this present epistle is similar to that in the second epistle; so the present reference, “if I come,” may be no more than an anticipation of a future visit.

I will remember. Gr. *hupomimnēskō*, “to bring to remembrance” (cf. John 14:26). The apostle asserts his leading position; he is confident of his authority, and does not quail before the disrupter.

Prating. Gr. *phluareō*, “to talk nonsense,” “to bring unjustified charges against.”

Malicious words. Or, “evil words.”

Not content therewith. Diotrophes was not satisfied with wicked words that were intended to undermine apostolic authority; he continued his opposition in unfriendly deeds.

Receive. Gr. *epidechomai* (see on v. 9). In refusing to offer hospitality to the traveling workers Diotrophes refused to acknowledge John’s authority, for the traveling brethren carried the apostle’s commendation with them.

Forbiddeth. Gr. *kōluō*, “to hinder,” “to prevent,” “to forbid,” suggesting that Diotrophes took active steps to prevent others from offering the hospitality that he himself refused to give. The form of the Greek verb implies a repeated hindering. The unfriendly act reflects the power possessed by Diotrophes in the local church, but the situation shows that the church was not wholeheartedly with him, for some, at least, were in harmony with the apostle and wished to receive the traveling workers.

Casteth them out. That is, excommunicates them (cf. John 9:34). It is clear that the contention was serious: there was a major clash between the apostolic school and the adherents of the false teachers. In this particular church the heretical party was at least temporarily in the ascendancy, and could impose its will on the body of its members.

11. Follow not. Rather, “imitate not.” John pauses in his discussion of the conflict within the church, and states general truths which, if observed, will enable Gaius always to make right decisions.

That which is evil. Literally, “the bad.”

That which is good. Literally, “the good”. In this stark language the apostle is probably analyzing the situation that confronted Gaius and his friends—the course pursued by Diotrophes is “bad,” and is not to be imitated; the course commended by John in vs. 5–8 is “good,” and should be put into practice.

Doeth good. In the remainder of the verse there is a striking similarity to the language used in the first epistle of John (cf. 1 John 3:6–10). Here is the positive expression of the truth that is stated negatively in 1 John 3:9. See comment there.

Doeth evil. Equivalent to the “sinneth” of 1 John 3:6.

12. Demetrius. The name means “belonging to Demeter,” that is, to the goddess of agriculture, known to the Latins as Ceres. John’s commendation of Demetrius removes any suspicion that the retention of his pagan name indicates any lingering sympathy with heathen religion (cf. on “Diotrophes,” v. 9).

There is no certain knowledge of Demetrius apart from what is found in this epistle. Some have suggested that he is identical with “Demetrius, a silversmith” (Acts 19:24), and that he had been converted under John’s ministry at Ephesus. Others have sought to

identify him with Demas (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:10; Philemon 24), but there is no scriptural support for either of these views. Since John is commending him to Gaius, it may be that he was the bearer of the letter in which he is mentioned, but even this is conjectural. The most that can be said with certainty is that Demetrius was a faithful Christian, loyal to the apostle, and that John felt impelled to give Gaius a specific and strong recommendation concerning him. This makes it reasonable to suppose that Demetrius' conduct had been under suspicion, and needed to be cleared by John before he would be unreservedly accepted by the apostolic party in the church of which Gaius was a member.

Hath good report. Literally, "has been witnessed to."

Of the truth itself. That is, Demetrius lived in harmony with Christian standards. John here personifies truth, and makes it witness to the excellence of his friend's character.

We also bear record. Gaius does not have to rely on a general commendation only concerning Demetrius, but is here given the personal testimony of John and his associates.

Ye know. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the reading, "though knowest," in harmony with the fact that the epistle is addressed to an individual, Gaius (cf. v. 13).

13. I had. That is, when John began to write the epistle he planned to discuss many matters, but contemplation of the grave situation in connection with the work of Diotrephes leads him to plan an early visit to the troubled church.

Many things. See on 2 John 12.

Pen. Gr. *kalamos*, "a reed," which, with its end beaten into a fine brush, was used for writing on papyrus.

14. Shortly. Gr. *eutheōs*, almost invariably translated in the NT as "immediately," or its equivalent. If this third epistle was destined for the same church as the second, the word *eutheōs* would indicate that the canonical order of the books is also the chronological order, with the third letter being written immediately prior to John's intended visit to the church (see p. 683).

Face to face. See on 2 John 12.

Peace. See on John 14:27; Rom. 1:7.

Our friends. Rather, "the friends," probably those who were likeminded with John and Gaius. There would be a close bond between the apostolic circle and the loyal members in the church of which Gaius was a member. Trouble raised by Diotrephes would but serve to strengthen the bonds of Christian friendship among the faithful members.

Salute. Gr. *aspazomai* (see on Rom. 16:3).

By name. Since no names are mentioned, it is probable that the apostle personally knew the companions of Gaius.

On a personal, friendly note, the epistle ends, as it had begun. Although the peace of the church had been disturbed by Diotrephes, the apostle did not allow the disruption to destroy the holy fellowship that united him with his spiritual children.

Amen. Textual evidence attests the omission of this word.

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (2 Jn 1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.